

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD
Oregon's Highway 26

SUMMER NIGHTS
Go Retro at the Drive-in

OUTDOOR PARADISE
Washington's Okanogan Valley

northwestmagazines.com

NORTHWEST travel

Golf, Grapes & Good Times

PRST STD
US POSTAGE PAID
PORTLAND, OR
PERMIT NO. 2160

*****AUTO**3-DIGIT 981
105203
ERIN PETRIE
1938 FAIRVIEW AVE E
SEATTLE WA 98102-3650

AUGUST 2009

\$4.95





a perfect weekend in Wenatchee

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JON KLEIN



CHANGE HAS COME to the “Apple Capital of the World.” For decades, the city of Wenatchee has reined supreme as orchard-central in Chelan County, Washington. Apples have been its lifeblood: Red Delicious. Golden Delicious. Granny Smith. Gala. Fuji. But many locals know one cannot live by apples alone. (Unless, of course, you own acres of them and have a long-term contract with an apple juice conglomerate.) Wenatchee’s sweet, albeit folksy, title lacked the gravity to draw urban dwellers from Seattle, two-and-half-hours west of this orchard-strewn valley fed by the Columbia and Wenatchee Rivers. Yes, many did come. They ate the cobbler and it was good. By all accounts—very good. For those that made the journey, Wenatchee was a town of comfort foods and blue-jean wisdom, the kind of place that just felt right. But wine has come to this land of orchards and rivers and the plum of Chelan County—or should I say the apple—may never be the same.

About 20 years ago, a few visionaries, such as Phyllis and Cameron Fries (White Heron Cellars) and Warren Moyles (La Toscana Winery) began to grow grapes in the nutrient-rich soil. In their hearts—and in their taste buds—they just knew that apple-growing soil would be the perfect marriage for grapes. They knew, or they were simply thirsty from all that cobbler. Whatever the reason, vines were planted. Wineries were built to press the grapes into wine. And true to form, the wine was good. Blessed with rich soil, 300 days of sunshine a year, and a passion for the grape, great varietals—Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Pinot Gris, Viognier, Chardonnay—appeared in the valley. A few, like Doug and Debé Brazil of **Chateau Faire Le Pont**, began to experiment with blends. Gold Medals followed. Word traveled.

Wenatchee wines had structure and complexity, rivaling anything that could be found in Walla Walla and beyond. It wasn't long before wine lovers from Portland and Seattle made their way to the foot of the Cascades, drawn to the lure of premium wines at less than premium prices. They drank the wine and looked out at the mighty Columbia and murmured that this place will soon be "big." Big—in a good way. Still, others gazed out at the undulating hills that ring the river and envisioned golf—golf with views. Golf with lunch, and, when I mean lunch I mean nine holes of golf followed by food that pares nicely with a glass of St Laurent Winery's 2007 Riesling, which just happened to win "Best of Class/Varietal" at the 2008 Tri-Cities Wine Competition.

Seemingly overnight, the "Apple Capital of the World" had been transplanted into a wine and golf destination. With so much to see and do in a weekend, planning is crucial. Of course, accommodation is high on the list when on a wine tasting holiday. I'm a hotel guy by nature. I never cozened up to lacy doilies and frilly curtains. But I got a tip that the Saddlerock Suite at the **Huckleberry Haven B & B** (509-881-9349; thehuckleberryhavenbedandbreakfast.com) was worth a try. Parked



in a residential neighborhood close to golf and wineries, the suite was actually a complete apartment. The bed was big. The kitchen was stocked with goodies and the TV was a flat screen. The digs even came with one of those fancy robes hanging in the closet. Stretched out on the sofa, nibbling on a loaf of just baked huckleberry banana bread, I must confess my thoughts drifted from football to fabric swatches. Ruth Leslie, the innkeeper, was attentive, yet never overbearing. And boy, can the woman cook. Breakfasts were multi-course feasts, including heaping portions of her "soon to be famous" fresh huckleberry jam. Sayonara Super 8.

Comfortably ensconced in luxury, I began to plan the weekend. What to do on a Friday night? For many wine-savvy locals, the answer is Friday Night Yappy Hour. No, that's not a typo. On the third Friday of every month, Wenatchee goes to the dogs—at least at the **Chateau Faire Le Pont Winery** (509-667-9463; fairelepont.com). Owners Debé



LEFT: Debé Brazil and Margeaux at Chateau Le Pont Winery.

ABOVE: Ruth Leslie, innkeeper at Huckleberry Haven B&B.



and Doug Brazil open a section of their impressive tasting room and go about raising money for the Humane Society. Locals drop by with their four-legged friends and enjoy the company of Debe's three labs (Margeaux, Pinot Gris, and

Kelly) while drinking wine and enjoying some . . . Yappatizers. Into its third year, Debe's fundraising and dog-matching efforts have placed more than 70 "pound" dogs into good homes. And this couple does more than make great wine and help dogs. The winery, housed in a 1920s fruit warehouse renovated down to the studs, is home to one of the first in-winery full service restaurants in the state of Washington. La Bonne Terre, under the direction of Executive Chef Richard Kitos, turns out a seared ahi in wasabi sauce that out-tastes and out-plates anything found in those rather hoity-toity establishments in Seattle or L.A. But that's to be expected, since Richard spent 20 years honing his chef skills at some of the best restaurants in Southern California.

Of course, Wenatchee locals do not live by food and wine alone.

The foothills have their share of golf courses, and for many in the valley, there is no better way to spend a Saturday afternoon than golfing at the **Highlander Golf Club** (509-884-4653; highlandergolfclub.com) in East Wenatchee. Built in 2002, the Highlander (par 72, 6,555 yards) is a links-style course, with several holes perched high on a plateau overlooking the Columbia River. (The 9th hole—the signature hole—requires just the right tee shot. Miss it, and your ball will find a new home at the bottom of a 300-foot canyon.) At a very reasonable \$54 a round with cart, it is a heavyweight course at a lightweight price. And, if that buy-in cuts a little too deep into your wine budget, the **Three Lakes Golf Club** (par 69, 5,378 yards) just south of Wenatchee offers you east Wenatchee River views

Bella Terrazza Vineyards.



at \$34 a round, with cart. (509-663-5448; threelakesgolf.com)

If a tad too much wine tasting sends you and your drives a little “sideways,” take Sunday off and enjoy Wenatchee’s famed **Ohme Gardens** (509-662-5785; ohmegardens.com). In its 80th year of operation, the Gardens are nine acres of rippling pools, shade-bearing Douglas firs, and lush groundcover all joined by a series of stone paths. Imagine a slice of the Olympic National Forest plucked smack dab into a semi-arid climate and you get the idea. Herman and Ruth Ohme, orchard growers by vocation, spent a lifetime planting and building the gardens, stone-by-stone, carrying water buckets hundreds of feet up the hill from the river below. Throw in a Summer Concert season, beginning July 2 and running through August 22, and the Ohme Gardens alone are worth the trip to the “Apple Capital of the World.”

And speaking of that certain ubiquitous fruit, it’s only fitting to pay respect to the little red orb that put Wenatchee on the map. Orchards and fruit stands abound in the valley, and there is no better place than Wenatchee to pull off the road, bite into a big fresh apple and let the juice dribble down your chin. And, if you have a hankering for cider—not just any cider, but gourmet cider—it is well worth the trip to the town of Cashmere, about 10 miles northwest of Wenatchee. There, you will find the **Cashmere Cider Mill** (509-782-3564; gourmetcider.com), and meet Marcia Green, master cider-maker. With a music venue, 1970s-style coffee house, and crushing facility, the Mill offers visitors a chance to enjoy the melodic sounds of local dulcimer player and cider crusher, Mike Berst. Mike is partial to the

Heritage blend, a gourmet concoction of Heirloom, Maiden Blush, and Newtown Pippin apples. One taste of this blend and you’re left wondering how something can be this good and not come from a barrel.

Wenatchee is about five hours from Portland, a little more than two-and-a-half hours from Seattle and about six hours from Bend. It offers

the perfect “undiscovered” weekend in the Pacific Northwest. All that’s required is a healthy appetite and a set of golf clubs to work off those extra calories. But leave a little room for dessert, for rumor has it that they make a mean apple cobbler. □

Jon Klein is a food and wine columnist for *The News Guard* newspaper in Lincoln City. He spent years working in the wine industry before moving to the Oregon Coast.



HOW WOULD YOU SPEND 300 DAYS OF SUNSHINE?

Located in the Heart of Washington State on the sunny side of the Cascade Mountains, Wenatchee is a short drive from Seattle and Spokane. More importantly, our location is an outdoor enthusiast’s dream ... hiking, biking, wine tasting, golfing, festivals and rafting are just a few of the activities to choose from.



WENATCHEE VALLEY
VISITORS BUREAU

25 N. Wenatchee Ave. | Wenatchee
INFO LINE (800) 572-7753
WWW.WENATCHEEVALLEY.ORG

Circle No. 244 on AD INFO CARD.